

October 13, 2011

The Honorable Ray LaHood
 Secretary of Transportation
 U.S. Dept. of Transportation
 West Building – 1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
 Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

The Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) fully supports and urges funding for the University of Illinois proposal to the U.S. Dept. of Transportation to fund a University Transportation Rail Center. MPC has been actively shaping freight and passenger rail policy for over a decade in the Chicago region. Beginning in 2001, MPC's Business Leaders for Transportation, a coalition representing more than 10,000 area employers, set out to identify the causes of surface freight delays and what can be done to eliminate them. The effort was kicked off with a regional conference titled "Improving Metropolitan Chicago's Freight Transportation Network" and the 2002 release of *Critical Cargo, A Regional Freight Action Agenda for jobs, economic growth and quality of life in metropolitan Chicago*.

Since that time, MPC has become a leading advocate and expert on transportation issues in Chicagoland. MPC now chairs the Civic Advisory Committee of the proposed new West Loop Transportation Center, a hub for local, suburban, and high speed rail, has recently been appointed by Governor Quinn to a special advisory group to study the feasibility of 220-mph passenger rail service between Chicago, Urbana-Champaign and beyond. In August, 2011 MPC released ***Bus Rapid Transit: Chicago's New Route to Opportunity***, a vision for a 10-route Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) network in Chicago that is feasible, best supports existing neighborhood assets, and fills accessibility gaps in the current rail transit network. We are now working with the Chicago Transit Authority and Dept. of Transportation on BRT implementation efforts. In Chicago's South Suburbs, MPC is working on a Green TIME Zone strategy to attract green manufacturing companies to locate near intermodal freight facilities as well as developing and rehabbing energy-efficient homes near transit. MPC also analyzes and promotes innovative financing tools for rail capital funding and operation and maintenance, like value capture and sharing road tolls with transit.

Through MPC's work in Northwest Indiana, we have highlighted the \$165 million expansion of the Canadian National Railway Kirk freight yard that it uses to build and repair general freight trains. The project also includes adding more freight car classification tracks and arrival-and-departure tracks to handle longer trains and increase car processing capacity to 2,500 a day from 1,500 now.

MPC fully supports and urges funding for the University of Illinois proposal to the U.S. Dept. of Transportation to fund a University Transportation Rail Center. MPC has a long history of partnering with the University of Illinois and believes the expertise at the center on rail issues would be an important asset to the Chicago region given that Chicago is the rail hub of the nation, handling 1300 freight and passenger trains per day. One-fourth of the nation's rail cargo passes through the region, making it the busiest U.S. rail freight hub. Chicago is a critical origin, destination and transfer point for both Amtrak's intercity and Metra commuter passenger rail service, which share freight rail tracks and depends on efficient operations. Chicago is also home to the second largest passenger rail system in the country.

The faculty at the University of Illinois is well suited to advance transportation expertise and technology, especially given the strength in both rail research and education of the

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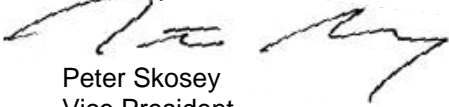
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proposed consortium. The economics of metropolitan Chicago, the State of Illinois, and the nation depend heavily on an effective transportation system to move freight and people. Funding for the University Transportation Rail Center therefore would bring significant economic benefits to the nation as a whole.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Skosey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "P" and a long, sweeping tail.

Peter Skosey
Vice President